

Grace Greater than Our Sins (history)

Julia Harriette Johnston (1849-1919) was the daughter of a Presbyterian minister. Johnston was faithful to the ministries of the church, serving as a Sunday school superintendent and teacher for 41 years. In addition to many Sunday school lessons, and authoring several books, she wrote about 500 hymn texts; today her reputation rests primarily upon the hymn “Grace Greater than Our Sin.”

The writer contrasts the theme of God’s abundant grace—manifest through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross—with “our sin and our guilt” (vs 1), “sin and despair” (vs 2), and a “dark . . . stain” (vs 3). This “marvelous, infinite, matchless grace, freely bestowed on all who believe,” finds a scriptural basis in Paul’s teaching of justification by faith in Romans 5:1-2.

The text and tune of the hymn first appeared in *Hymns Tried and True*, a 1911 collection by composer Daniel B. Towner (1850-1919). According to *UM Hymnal* editor Carlton Young, Towner was “a distinguished Methodist musician.” He studied first with his father and then with famous gospel song composers such as George Root and George Webb. He then served in Methodist Episcopal churches in New York, Ohio and Kentucky. In 1893 he was named head of the music department at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.

Baptist hymnologist William J. Reynolds noted that the name MOODY was given to this tune in recognition of Towner’s association with and service to Moody Bible Institute and its founder.

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Psalm 138

¹ I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing your praise;

² **I bow down toward your holy temple
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast
love and faithfulness;**

for you have exalted your name
and your word above everything.

³ **On the day I called, you answered me,
you strengthened my life.**

⁴ All the rulers of the earth shall praise you, O LORD,
for they have heard the words of your mouth;

⁵ and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD,
for great is the glory of the LORD.

⁶ For the LORD is high, but regards the lowly;
yet knows the haughty from afar.

⁷ Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve my life;

**you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies
and your right hand delivers me.**

⁸ O LORD fulfill your purpose for me;

**O LORD, may your steadfast love endure forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.**

2 Corinthians 4:13- 5:1

¹³ And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I believed and therefore I spoke,” we also believe and therefore speak, ¹⁴ knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present *us* with you. ¹⁵ For all things *are* for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more

exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory,¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

5 ¹For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Great Thanksgiving for the Season after Pentecost

Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another. Therefore, let us confess our sin before God and one another.

Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive us, we pray. Free us for joyful obedience, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hear the good news:

Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that proves God's love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven! Glory to God. Amen.

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life.

When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.

You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God, and spoke to us through your prophets, who looked for that day when justice shall roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream, when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ.

Your Spirit anointed him to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to announce that the time had come when you would save your people. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners. By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection, you gave birth to your Church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit. At his ascension you exalted him to sit and reign with you at your right hand.

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:

"Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet. Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty Father, now and forever. **Amen.**